



# Micro enterprise projects

From dependence to independence

## The Plight

In India, the Dalit community has been discriminated against for more than 3000 years and although the practice is against the Indian constitution and prohibited by many laws they are still deprived of any social privileges, especially in rural areas. They are deemed to be 'educationally backward', economically deprived and politically powerless. In the main, they are neglected and don't have any access to resource or welfare support from the government or any other regional or local body. With long periods of unemployment, the situation is exacerbated and the resulting exploitation and lack of opportunities are the main roots of poverty.

## Marginalisation of women

The role of women becomes crucial in these families where the male contribution to the household income is low. As a result, the family is heavily dependent on the earning potential of women, and/or children, for survival and a significant number of women are sole contributors to the family income. Often, Dalit women resort to working as bonded agricultural labourers with low/under paid wages, in spite of their knowledge and skills in other areas of life. The extreme perennial economic deprivation for women has also resulted in illiteracy, malnourishment and poor health conditions. In addition they are overworked, oppressed and victimised by entrenched patriarchal attitudes within the family and the wider community.

## The need for economic empowerment

Many rural women remain financially illiterate, held back by deeply entrenched caste discrimination, child marriage, dowry system, child labour, and domestic violence. The journey to empowerment is long and problematic for these women. They do not have access to any form of financial credit and are denied rights to property.

Kamla Foundation is working to develop the potential of these vulnerable women and enhance their quality of life. We are working with the FORD Trust to develop a comprehensive program of micro enterprises in order for these women to break the "cycle of dependency". We are providing access to micro credit, imparting usable economic skills and training and helping to establish business enterprises, all methods by which these women can break from generations of neglect and oppression.

## The Legacy

By providing support for a range of micro enterprise activities, we are creating skilled members in the community who will be making a strong contribution to village life. This automatically leads to sustainable improvements in the quality of life for their immediate family, by providing adequate food, shelter, clothing, education and health care.

The micro enterprises are low investment based, simple technology oriented and feasible with low start-up costs. This type of activity is bringing a sustained improvement to the livelihoods of these vulnerable women and changing their lives for the better.



*"You can tell the condition of a nation by looking at the status of its women"*

Jawaharlal Nehru